

Themes of the 2007 NASPA Conference

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The themes of the 2007 NASPA conference, "A Shared Perspective: Assessment as a Cross-Campus Strategy for Improving Student Learning and Retention" were varied but familiar in terms of general trends and directions for assessment in higher education. The keynote speakers focused their remarks on the political contexts of assessment in higher education. Clearly, the NCLB legislation and discussions in state capitals across the United States points to a focus on accountability. In the current political climate, there is a demand for all levels of education and training to be accountable for the tax dollars they receive. Several of the keynote presenters also stated their opinions directly that if higher education will not develop its own assessment measures, then government will force assessment onto higher education.

In the individual sessions there was a sense that institutions need to push beyond the standard metrics of graduation rates to look at what is actually being learned in the classroom, in engagement activities, and in activities beyond the university. Outcomes assessment plays an increasingly more visible role in higher education.

Several sessions focused on integrating strategic planning and assessment in continuous feedback loops. This is not an annual process, however, and I think Ferris has much data to draw on as we begin the strategic planning process. Nonetheless, it is important that we examine the multiple assessment tools we have used, including the YAR, APR, NSSE, Academic Profiles, and general education data, as we engage in planning the future direction of the university.

Several of the sessions also focused on managing data and making institutional change as a result of assessment activities. We need to consider a web-based assessment collection and management tool to provide the institution with a central repository of assessment information and to integrate assessment with planning.

Finally, assessment will not be successful if we do not involve the various stakeholders, including administration, faculty, staff, and students, in the process. We need to get everyone to understand how they fit into the process and why the assessment process is important to the university.